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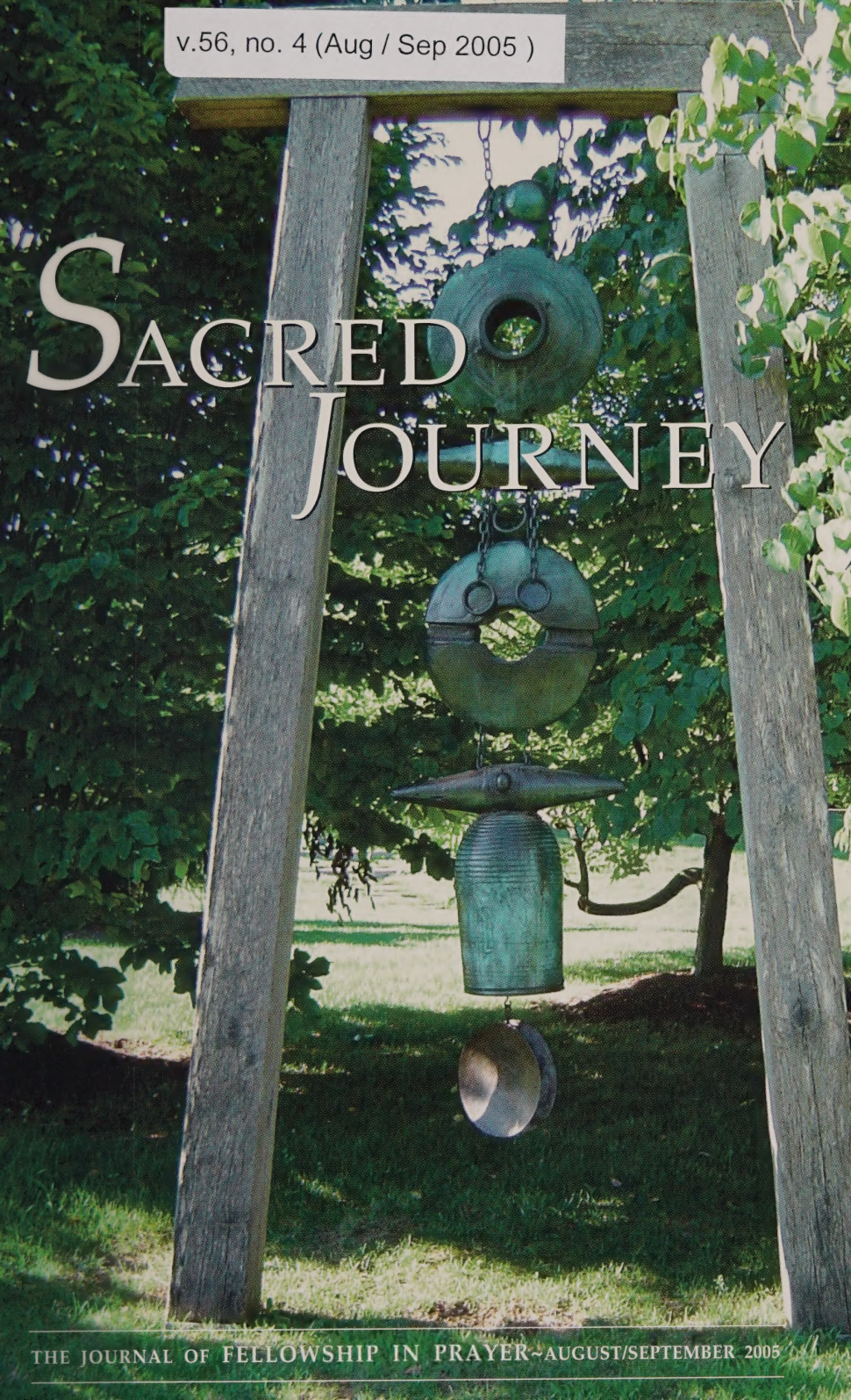

SACRED JOURNEY

THE JOURNAL OF FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER~AUGUST/SEPTEMBER 2005

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THE JOURNAL OF FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER

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a spiritual orientation to life,

to promote the practice of

prayer,

meditation,

and service to others,

and to help bring about

a deeper spirit of unity

among humankind.

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Cover photo: Grounds for Sculpture, Hamilton, NJ, by Louise Hutner

Finding Light Through Darkness

"'Why do good people suffer' or "Why does God allow suffering?' The only answer offered is that God himself takes part in the human experience of suffering. He doesn't stay in the tomb but rises, proclaiming that evil is not the final word and human life is not ultimately tragic."

~ Dr. Albert Raboteau

I received a letter from a prisoner a few days ago. This is not unusual at our office. We send *SACRED JOURNEY* to a few prisons and periodically a prisoner writes to us, sharing a story or a poem, and expressing gratitude for the gift of faith, comfort, and inspiration that our writers offer in each issue. We don't typically print letters from readers here, but this one struck me as I've been preparing this issue for you. Several of the writings in this issue deal with the dualities of suffering and joy, darkness and light, struggle and letting be. Our friend David's words fit right into this discussion. Here's what he wrote to us:

"I recently read some literature that inspired me to give thanks to you for sharing the word of God with me and other inmates who many people believe are

unworthy of truly being guided to the path of righteousness. Without God-loving people to still embrace us on a spiritual and emotional level, many on the inside would be suicidal, or really activate the animal instincts society perceives them to possess. When you realize that God is so complex and no one can predict what he plans to do with us, that includes people from all walks of life.

It would be so easy to look at my surroundings and allow the despair and hopelessness to cause me to radiate negative energy. But the love of God is so powerful it suffocates the devil's initiative to conquer. What's ironic is that God-fearing men get the most respect in here, the light is better than darkness, and we have a choice which one we want to represent. I know I made the right choice.

Once again thank you for reaching out to those who need spiritual guidance. God Bless You. David."

Suffering and despair run rampant in our world—perhaps they always have and always will; but as you'll read in these pages, suffering need not be the last word. Albert Raboteau says this in the context of Christian Orthodoxy. Thich Nhat Hanh says it from a Buddhist perspective. And in our tribute to Gerald May, we find the same thread continuing through the Christian concept of the dark night of the soul.

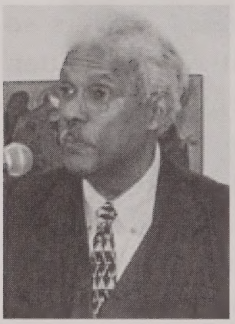
Suffering is an integral part of the human experience but perhaps "not the final word." May you learn from it; may you grow through it; and may you live in ever-increasing love, peace, and joy.

"Don't wait until you have no more suffering before allowing yourself to be happy. Please don't be imprisoned by your suffering." ~ Thich Nhat Hanh

OUR FEATURE

Life in a Minor Key

An Interview with Dr. Albert Raboteau



"I was drawn in part by a sense of profound similarity between Orthodoxy and the ethos of African-American Christianity. In both there is a quality of sad joyfulness, a sense that life in a minor key is life as it is; an emphasis on the importance of suffering as a mark of the authenticity of faith."

Dr. Albert J. Raboteau is the Henry W. Putnam Professor of Religion at Princeton University and author of the memoir A Sorrowful Joy: The Spiritual Journey of an African-American Man in Late Twentieth-Century America. *Raboteau was born to a Catholic family in Mississippi, three months after his father was killed by a white man in 1943. He grew up in segregated times, married, became a successful college professor and administrator, then lost his way and had to start over. His spiritual journey led him to a conversion to the Christian Orthodox Church that reconciled him to his past: his religious heritage, his African roots, and his family.*

The oldest division in Christianity is between the Eastern Orthodox and Western Roman Catholic Churches. Christian Orthodoxy (the second largest Christian denomination in the world, after Roman Catholicism) is a union of independent churches. Each is led by its own head

bishop. Orthodox churches share a common faith, common principles and organization, and a common liturgical tradition. The patriarch in Constantinople is analogous to the pope in that he represents the Orthodox Church to the world, but he does not have administrative powers beyond his own territory and he does not claim infallibility. The principle split between Orthodox Christians and Roman Catholics occurred in 1054.

Orthodox Christians traditionally have lived in societies of cultural, linguistic, and religious uniformity; but today they face increasing pluralism, especially those who live in the U.S. The Orthodox Church does not have an official pronouncement expressing its attitude toward other religions; however, Orthodoxy has a long-standing tradition of respect and tolerance for people of other faiths: "Being created in the image of God, every human being is our brother and sister." They would say that one cannot be a Christian if one does not embrace the doctrine of tolerance as a mandate of Christian love.

Dr. Raboteau kindly answered these questions from editor Louise Hutner and summer intern Megan McInerney.

Louise Hutner: We were very moved by your recent memoir, *A Sorrowful Joy*.

Albert Raboteau: Oh, thank you. It's always a little embarrassing to write about yourself. It started out as two lectures given at the Harvard Divinity School, and six months later I got a contract in the mail reminding me that they were going to publish them!

Would you have written the memoir if you hadn't delivered those lectures? And would you have been this open?

I don't know. I might not have written it in this form—it's very oral. A number of people have told me that it resonates with their own spiritual journeys and experiences, and have commented that the tenor of *A Sorrowful Joy* is accurate to their own circumstances. For them, life is in a minor key; we do experience tragedies and loss and sorrow but that is not all. Life is not merely tragic, it's tragicomic.

Can you explain why you see your journey, or anyone's journey, as one of sorrowful joy?

For me, the sorrowful joy aspect is tied up with Christianity. The logic and narrative of Christianity—death and resurrection—are built into the pattern of sorrowful joy and are an adequate narrative for life.

In the current issue of SJ we have a piece by Mary Ford Grabowsky. She just published *Stations of the Light* and challenges Christianity's focus through the ages on Christ's death without giving similar weight to the joy in Christ's resurrection.

It's interesting that in the early days of Christianity Christ was never depicted on a cross. It took centuries before that developed. Early images of Christ were images of him as a shepherd. The Eastern tradition—and this is part of the appeal of Orthodoxy for me—has always emphasized the Resurrection. The primary image in Orthodoxy is not the crucifix but Christ in power; the cross is always seen in light of Resurrection. For me the emphasis is not on the cross (or sorrow) but on the combination of the two. If you overemphasize one it leads you to slight the other and

flatten the experience. It's really important to keep both the sorrow and the joy; both aspects are essential.

Is the Christian understanding—that life is suffering and is to be transformed into joy—similar to Buddhist thought?

I think it's different. For Buddhists, I think suffering is an illusion and the transformation is being able to see that suffering is an illusion. For Christians, suffering is not an illusion. It's a given of brokenness in the world and in ourselves; so it's a different narrative.

Megan McInerney: Is there a sense in which suffering is necessary and unnecessary?

I think it would be a mistake to look at suffering as inherently good. It isn't, especially unjust suffering. The Christian narrative isn't that God became human and died, but that God became human and suffered as an innocent victim of injustice. So suffering can be neutral—there are accidents and illnesses and things like that—and to prize suffering alone is not the Christian narrative.

Is there a sense among Christians that we're all sinful, and that by suffering you earn your way to heaven?

I would say that one doesn't have to seek suffering; it will find you. And then the issue is—and perhaps here there is a resonance with Buddhism—how do you treat suffering? Take the issue of unjust suffering. How do you deal with children who die of horrible diseases, with unjust death, with evil? This is where the Christian narrative

comes in; some suffering is due to evil and to the brokenness of the world. No logical answer is given to the question "Why do good people suffer" or "Why does God allow suffering?" The only answer offered is that God himself takes part in the human experience of suffering. He doesn't stay in the tomb but rises, proclaiming that evil is not the final word and human life is not ultimately tragic. Evil will be overcome and has been overcome, in principle, in the death and resurrection of God's son.

There is an ascetic strand of Christianity, but it does not seek suffering for suffering's sake; it seeks discipline for one's life in order to overcome passions—today what we might call obsessions, like consumerism. The mystical way always involved giving up good things for transformation of our personalities which are in the grip of passions, obsessions, and habits, some of which are passed on from generation to generation, some of which are due to our environments, some of which are just inherent to our own character as human beings.

How do you put into words what it is that you are being transformed into?

In the Orthodox tradition, we're made in the image and likeness of God, so when we are transformed, we are becoming more and more like the image in which we were created. The problem is that we often act in ways that are very unlike that image. It can never be erased, but we efface the image with our unkindness, lack of compassion, selfishness, and greed. The task of the Christian is to become like the icons which radiate with light, the kind of light that means that we are becoming divinized.

Icons function as windows into the Kingdom of God,

Theophanes the Greek, late 14th century

models of what we are to become. We are to be icons for each other just as the originals were icons of Christ. As icons, we emit the light that comes from the presence of the Holy Spirit. If one does that, then the light shining out will hopefully shed light and warmth into the darkness of the lives of others. There's an ongoing process whereby individual divinization acts as an icon to help others.

We are not divine by nature but by grace. We all have the capacity to become divinized. We are all made in that image and likeness, but it's only possible to become fully that image through sharing in God's life—in classical Christianity, through baptism and the sacramental life.

How does your African-American spirituality complement your religion?

In a number of ways. The first is the emphasis upon suffering. The world rejects what it sees as threatening, and people who fully live their faith are subject to persecution of some sort. The second is the historical aspect of slave Christianity. In our country, slave Christians were similar to the martyrs and confessors of the early church or to those who suffered under totalitarian regimes in Eastern Europe. A number of writers have described similarities between the Russian peasant experience and the African-American experience.

Do you see a similarity with the Jewish experience?

Certainly. African-American culture is filled with the rhetoric of the Old Testament Exodus experience, and one finds that in the Orthodox liturgy as well. If you notice, on the altar we have a menorah.

To return to African-American piety: another connection for me is the notion of inspirited body and embodied spirit. Within Orthodoxy, rather than a dichotomy between spirit and matter, there is sensuousness, represented through the incense and candles, involved in the body and matter.

And that's true of African American spirituality as well?

Yes. In the African-American tradition the human heart is the altar of God; the person and the embodiment of spirit in worship are extremely important. The sad and joyful tone of chants in a minor key, a sense of the miraculous, and emphasis on healing and miracles are some of the similarities. For me two of the strongest are the experience of suffering Christianity, and the quality of what is called *penthos*, the sadness mingled with joy.

MM: Some people haven't suffered as much as others. Are they further removed from the Divine and the kind of transforming experience you mention because of that?

Everybody is going to grow old and die. Your parents die, your children die. It's hard for me to think of a life without suffering. I think the best answer to this is Mother Teresa. Wealthy white Americans would come to help her in India and she would send them back home to tend to people suffering in their own neighborhoods. We live in a wealthy environment but there are people who are filled with suffering: psychological, emotional, from divorce, mental illness, alcoholism, drug abuse. Our lives are riddled with suffering, and it doesn't mean being hungry necessarily. It can mean having too much. What we suffer from,

perhaps, is a very subtle and frightening form of need which is addiction to consumerism. It can be particularly insidious because it blinds us to reality. It's like the gospel parable of the wealthy man who says, "I need to build bigger barns because these are too full." There's a blindness that comes with comfort. We become blind to our responsibility for those who suffer. Our consumption blinds us to what goes on in the rest of the world: children starving, widespread illness and poverty—all the discussion in the press about aid to Africa—what are our resources going towards?

That raises a question about a life of relative solitude and personal faith versus a life of service to the community.

I think that both are necessary. The truly compassionate person mourns for every living creature that suffers. There's a compassion that the solitary person derives through his or her own silence. In solitude we meet with God and, meeting God, meet all of creation, the hidden wholeness of all that is. Like the systole and diastole of the human heart, both solitude and community are necessary. Unless one has some sense of silence and stillness, the ability to give will be eroded. Then social action becomes a form of violence instead of a truly compassionate giving of oneself. Monks are not praying only for themselves; they are praying for the entire world. There really is a fellowship of prayer that is much more powerful and tangible than we commonly realize.

Why did you fall out of your religious life for a period and then return to it?

It was very much because my religious life became merely intellectual. I was teaching theology and was becoming increasingly removed from religious experience. The old answers just weren't working for me.

Were those old answers things you'd grown up with?

Some of them. Some were answers I'd learned; I knew the doctrine very well but it didn't fit my own life. I went into a period of aestheticism where beauty was the most important thing, and I wrote a lot of bad poetry . . . And then two things happened—my oldest child, Albert, was born, and my mother died. I couldn't make sense of these two events except through the mysteries and the sacraments. These two events, a birth and a death, were the experiential connections that I needed. I felt that my mother's death summoned and connected me to my ancestors, and my son's birth connected me to my future posterity. This led me to return to religion on a much deeper experiential level as part of a connection to a living tradition. Rather than a set of dogmas or doctrines, religion became a living tradition of faith that stretches back and forth in time, and that I am a part of.

I wonder if many of the people you routinely see in church have the same depth of connection that you just described?

All of us lose it and gain it and lose it and regain it. Part of the problem with ritual is that it becomes ritualized. For all of us it becomes habit. In the Orthodox liturgy the priest often says, "Let us attend," and what he means is, "Wake up, something important is happening." Year after

year we go through the liturgical seasons. . . there's always another chance to penetrate more deeply into the mystery. It's not that once and for all you'll experience the aliveness of worship, but that you have to be brought back again and again to its meaning.

How do you feel about the merging of religion and politics in our culture?

Of course, religion has a right at the table. The problem is that when you come to the table you have to be prepared to argue your position with others. You can't presume that just because you say it's so, others will be convinced. I would say that the willingness to dialogue with others is crucial. There has to be dialogue for democracy to work and, of all people, religious people have to be compassionate and approach others with charity and concern. A model many people return to is the civil rights movement, where obviously religion was a major component of the political activism in the struggle to attain civil rights for African-Americans. There, you had dialogue and cooperation among Protestants, Catholics, Jews, agnostics, folks of all stripes.

MM: You wrote an article for the Boston Review called "American Salvation" in which you talk about how the roots of democracy in this country have changed. The pursuit of happiness has now become synonymous with pursuit of property and the gap between the rich and the poor is enormous.

A woman in our parish, from Latin America, talks about the abundance here and her sense that something's wrong,

there's too much. One of the stories I love is Faulkner's "The Bear." The main character comes to realize the necessity of relinquishing his inheritance of ownership of the land, passed on to him because of crimes committed in the past. I think Americans could really use a healthy dose of relinquishing. In the story, in order to see the mystical bear, he has to get rid of his compass, watch, and gun. We've encased ourselves in armor against the earth, which is our natural place to walk and be, and until we relinquish much more of what we have we will be out of joint.

Is that similar to the Buddhist concept of letting go?

Yes, it is. How much do you really need? In addition to silence and solitude there's also simplicity. The minute you start getting a lot of possessions you've lost simplicity.

How do we keep our fervency for our religion from being a divisive factor?

It's important to realize that true fervency is not fervency for your religion, it's fervency for God. Religion points to God. All religions are not the same—to say that they are is to trivialize the significant differences—but most religions point to God. Fervency becomes dangerous when it turns religion into an ideology, a way to prove your own rightness.

When you say you have fervency for God, not for religion, are you using religion to mean the practices?

No, I'm referring to the use of religion as a particular form of asserting my self-identity. True religion points to God,

not to the self. I once told an Orthodox bishop that I feel hypocritical talking about religion because, like everyone, I'm imperfect. He said when speaking on religion always remember that you are pointing towards Christ, not towards yourself. Remember the story of Jesus walking on the water? Peter says "If you will, let me come to you." Peter walks on the water and then he sees the wind and waves and he begins to sink. The minute you begin pointing religion to yourself, you begin to sink. If you can keep your focus on God then religion doesn't become a self-defense mechanism or a proof of being right. The folks who are really practitioners, the ones who are truly fervent, are the ones who are able to speak to one another. There is a resonance between them, because they are able to speak on an experiential level that allows them to understand one another.

What do you as a devout Christian say to a Jew who clearly doesn't believe that Christ is the son of God? If you believe that Christ is the path, what do you say to him?

(Laughs) Well I wouldn't just walk up to him on the street and preach. Sometimes we are awfully good at preaching with words but not with actions. St. Francis said "Go out and preach the gospel, and if necessary you may even use words." It's important that our preaching takes place through our lives. If people perceive the image and likeness of God within our lives, it will preach to them and it will draw them. You don't just go knocking on someone's door to say, "I'm here to preach to you." You preach when it's appropriate and possible. One has to depend upon openness to the Spirit. The Spirit will enable your witness to be effective in ways that you may never know. *A Sorrowful*

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Joy has had an impact on people. I get emails telling me how it has affected people's lives, and I don't want to be too grandiose, but it is being used by the Spirit in ways that I have no way of accounting for.

The fact that you spoke in terms of your own life makes your writing so accessible to all people.

I think you put your finger precisely on the nature of witnessing to others; one witnesses out of one's personal life—in Protestant terms, testimony—where appropriate and when welcome. But it's up to the spirit to move the person. Some may not be moved to become Orthodox, but others may be moved to an appreciation of some truth, and that is what God wills for them.

That's exactly what we are trying to do through this journal. We offer writings that are accessible to everyone because they contain some experience or truth that most people can relate to no matter what the religious context

Yes, we understand by way of analogy. When you read or hear a story, you begin to make analogies with your own life story and, in the process of recognizing both the similarities and the differences, you open yourself to new insights. Think about literature as a model. Dostoyevsky is very Russian, but if you read him, there's something that speaks to you even if you are not Russian. It is through the particular that we get to the universal.

That's back to where we began with sorrow and joy. It's not one or the other, it's the combination of the two.

ILLUMINATIONS

I have been in sorrow's kitchen and licked all the pots. Then I have stood on the peaky mountain wrapped in rainbows, with a harp and sword in my hand.

~ *Zora Neale Hurston*

You cannot prevent the birds of sorrow from flying over your head, but you can prevent them from building nests in your hair.

~ *Chinese proverb*

Suffering has its well-defined limits. Suffering can be both wise and unwise, and when the limit is reached, to prolong it would be not unwise but the height of folly.

~ *Gandhi*

Spirituality is not to be learned by flight from the world, by running away from things, or by turning solitary and going apart from the world. Rather, we learn an inner solitude wherever or with whomsoever we may be. We must learn to penetrate things and find God there.

~ *Meister Eckhart*

We come to God by love and not by navigation.

~ *Saint Augustine*

Prayer may not change things for you, but it sure changes you for things.

~ *Samuel Shoemaker*

Faith means being grasped by a power that is greater than we are, a power that shakes us and turns us, and transforms and heals us. Surrender to this power is faith.

~ *Paul Tillich*

I wish I could show you, when you are lonely or in darkness, the Astonishing Light of your own Being!

~ *Hafiz*

Whenever evil befalls us, we ought to ask ourselves, after the first suffering, how we can turn it into good. So shall we take occasion, from one bitter root, to raise perhaps many flowers.

~ *Leigh Hunt*

I have not ceased being fearful, but I have ceased to let fear control me. I have accepted fear as a part of life, specifically the fear of change, the fear of the unknown, and I have gone ahead despite the pounding in the heart that says: turn back, turn back, you'll die if you venture too far.

~ *Erica Jong*

The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes.

~ *Marcel Proust*

The solution to the problem of the day is the awakening of the consciousness of humanity to the divinity within.

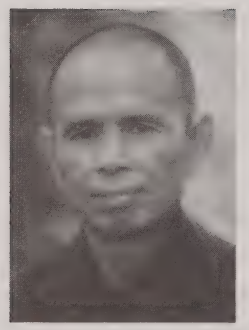
~ *Hazrat Inayat Khan*

The greatest hero is he who makes his enemy his friend.

~ *The Talmud*

The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching:
Transforming Suffering Into Peace, Joy, & Liberation

Thich Nhat Hanh



Buddha was not a god. He was a human being like you and me, and he suffered just as we do. If we go to Buddha with our hearts open, he will look at us, his eyes filled with compassion, and say, "Because there is suffering in your heart, it is possible for you to enter my heart."

For forty-five years, the Buddha said, over and over again, "I teach only suffering and the transformation of suffering." When we recognize and acknowledge our own suffering, the Buddha—which means the Buddha in all of us—will look at it, discover what has brought it about, and prescribe a course of action that can transform it into peace, joy, and liberation. Suffering is the means the Buddha used to liberate himself, and it is also the means by which we can become free.

The ocean of suffering is immense, but if you turn around, you can see the land. The seed of suffering in you may be strong, but don't wait until you have no more suffering before allowing yourself to be happy. When one tree in the garden is sick, you have to care

for it. But don't overlook all the healthy trees. Even while you have pain in your heart, you can enjoy the many wonders of life—the beautiful sunset, the smile of a child, the many flowers and trees. To suffer is not enough. Please don't be imprisoned by your suffering.

If you have experienced hunger, you know that having food is a miracle. If you have suffered from the cold, you know the preciousness of warmth. When you have suffered, you know how to appreciate the elements of paradise that are present. Don't ignore your suffering, but don't forget to enjoy the wonders of life, for your sake and for the benefit of many beings.

Without suffering, you cannot grow. Without suffering, you cannot get the peace and joy you deserve. Please don't run away from your suffering. Embrace it and cherish it. Go to the Buddha, sit with him, and show him your pain. He will look at you with loving kindness, compassion, and mindfulness, and show you ways to embrace your suffering and look deeply into it. With understanding and compassion you will be able to heal the wounds in your heart, and the wounds in the world. The Buddha called suffering Holy Truth, because our suffering has the capacity of showing us the path to liberation. Embrace your suffering, and let it reveal to you the way to peace.

It is true that the Buddha taught the truth of suffering, but he also taught the truth of "dwelling happily in things as they are." To succeed in the practice, we must stop trying to prove anything. If we touch the truth of suffering with our mindfulness, we will be able to recognize and identify our specific

suffering, its specific causes, and the way to remove those causes and end our suffering.

There is a story in Zen circles about a man and a horse. The horse is galloping quickly, and it appears that the man on the horse is going somewhere important. Another man, standing alongside the road, shouts, "Where are you going?" and the first man replies, "I don't know! Ask the horse!" This is also our story. We are riding a horse, we don't know where we are going, and we can't stop. The horse is our habit energy pulling us along, and we are powerless. We are always running, and it has become a habit. We struggle all the time, even during our sleep. We are at war within ourselves, and we can easily start a war with others.

We have to learn the art of stopping—stopping our thinking, our habit energies, our forgetfulness, the strong emotions that rule us. When an emotion rushes through us like a storm, we have no peace. We turn on the TV and then we turn it off. We pick up a book and then we put it down. How can we stop our fear, despair, anger, and craving? We can stop by practicing mindful breathing, mindful walking, mindful smiling, and deep looking in order to understand. When we are mindful, touching deeply the present moment, the fruits are always understanding, acceptance, love, and the desire to relieve suffering and bring joy.

Reprinted from The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching *(1998) by Thich Nhat Hanh, with permission of Parallax Press, Berkeley, California,* www.parallax.org. *Paperback edition, 1999, Broadway Books, New York.*

Megan McInerney

Morning Canticle

Watch night
pull clouds from its eyes,
stretch and turn the sky.
Sun's lazy opened lid,
slides on sea-swept shore,
moments before stars
fade like dreams.

The holiest of times,
fall and climb of waves'
insistent, steady roar.

God's hand
has touched the land.

Gulls rise and fly above
an open stretch of beach,
wind-blown footprints
write a prayer upon the sand.

Nothing stays,
wind carries it away.
Peace, another day.

Lorraine A. Vail

Surrender

Buffeted by blow after blow
I cower in confusion,
let misfortunes take over,
stop thinking, planning,
        reasoning,
questioning,
                and wait.
        Empty.

Holy Power holds me.
I wait, empty.

Tiny glimmers invade.
A child smiles.
Sun glistens on wet leaves.
A bird chirps.
I take note,
        unbend,
        open,
        and accept hope.

Jeanette Blonigen Clancy

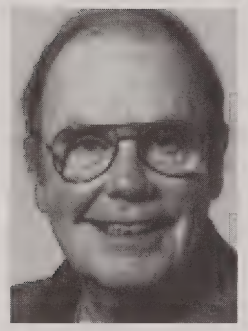
Liquidity

Sharp blue skies
in the warm gentle days of
One final slow ripening of summer
One long surrendering kiss of the
Beloved.

Arnold Gerstein

The Dark Night of the Soul

Gerald G. May



"Peace is not something you can force on anything or anyone... much less upon one's own mind. It is like trying to quiet the ocean by pressing upon the waves. Sanity lies in somehow opening to the chaos, allowing anxiety, moving deeply into the tumult, diving into the waves, where underneath, within, peace simply is."

~ Gerald May

In our last issue (June/July 2005) we told you with sadness of Gerald May's death from lymphoma in April. Jerry was a friend of ours at SACRED JOURNEY *and our parent organization, Fellowship in Prayer, especially of our director emeritus, Paul Walsh. He participated in our 2002 conference in Princeton, NJ, "Companions on the Sacred Journey," at which he gave a keynote address entitled "Spiritual Companionship in the Dark Night," and he led a workshop on "The Unknowing Spiritual Director."*

Jerry was a psychiatrist who was well known for his writings on psychology and spirituality, for his teaching, and for his gifts as a spiritual guide. He practiced psychiatry from 1971-1988. In 1973 he joined the staff of the Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation as an associate. Shalem is an ecumenical Christian community dedicated to the support of contemplative living and leadership. From 1983 to 2005, he

served the Shalem Institute as Director of Spiritual Guidance, Director for Research and Program Development, and finally as Senior Fellow in Contemplative Theology and Psychology.

Jerry authored numerous articles and books over the span of 35 years, blending spirituality and psychology, including Addiction & Grace; The Awakened Heart; Care of Mind/ Care of Spirit; *and* Will and Spirit. *He was a scholar of the work of St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross, and his most recent book,* The Dark Night of the Soul, *examines their work in depth.*

We offer you here some words from this recent writing, in tribute to his memory:

When people speak of going through a dark night of the soul, they usually mean they're experiencing bad things. The bad news is that bad things happen to everyone, and they have nothing to do with whether you are a good or bad person, how effectively you've taken charge of your life, or how carefully you've planned for the future. The good news, or at least part of it, is that good things happen to everyone too.

At the outset I must confess that I am no longer very good at telling the difference between good things and bad things. . . Some things start out looking great but wind up terribly, while other things seem bad in the beginning but turn out to be blessings in disguise. I was diagnosed with cancer in 1995, which I thought was a bad thing. But the experience brought me closer to God and to my loved ones than I'd ever been, and that was wonderfully good . . . At some point I gave up trying to decide what's ultimately good or bad. I truly do not know. . .

The dark night of the soul is not restricted to holy people. It can happen to anyone. I believe that in some ways it

happens to everyone. Yet it is much more significant than simple misfortune. It is a deep transformation, a movement toward indescribable freedom and joy. . .

The dark night is a profoundly good thing. It is an ongoing spiritual process in which we are liberated from attachments and compulsions and empowered to live and love more freely. Sometimes this letting go of old ways is painful, occasionally even devastating. But this is not why the night is called "dark." The darkness of the night implies nothing sinister, only that the liberation takes place in hidden ways, beneath our knowledge and understanding. It happens mysteriously, in secret, and beyond our conscious control. . .

More than anything, I think the dark night of the soul gives *meaning* to life. . .

The meaning revealed in the dark night is beyond understanding. One cannot fully comprehend it. But one is left with an ever deepening certainty that the meaning is there, that life is much more than coping and adjustment. Mysterious as it may be, there is something wonderful at the heart of our existence, and it is about nothing other than love: love for God, love for one another, love for creation, love for life itself.

During the twenty-five years I praticed medicine and psychiatry, I had the honor of accompanying many people in their struggles to cope with suffering. . . All too often, though, our preoccupation with finding relief left little opportunity to look for meaning This is the curse of a health-care system dedicated only to fixing problems, a system too streamlined to be concerned with what's happening to people's souls.

Frustrated, I found myself gradually leaving the practice of medicine and dedicating myself more to the

art of spiritual companionship. Here the priorities are reversed; we continue to care about easing suffering, but the meaning is what's most important. It was in this context that I first encountered St. John of the cross's writings about the dark night of the soul. . .

I can't avoid sounding like a New Age fanatic as I speak of this, but the more I read, the more it seemed this sixteenth-century Spanish friar understood me—actually knew me at the deepest level of my being. More than Freud or Jung or any of the other psychiatric authorities I'd read, John described my own experience. Further, he made sense of it.

John of the Cross has been seriously misinterpreted and misunderstood. The dark night of the soul, in John's original sense, is in no way sinister or negative. It is, instead, a deeply encouraging vision of the joys and pains we all experience in life. It inspires the desire to minimize suffering and injustice wherever possible, and at the same time it sheds a hope-filled light on the pains that cannot be avoided. It is too wonderful a thing to remain esoteric and too profound to be trivialized.

Another misunderstanding . . . is the assumption that authentic spiritual growth requires great and dramatic tragedy. It's a myth that takes many forms, from "Suffering is good for the soul" to "No pain, no gain." It has even been used to justify human suffering as somehow being "God's will."

Many people have confided in me that they feel their spiritual lives are somehow deficient because they have not suffered enough. Certainly life brings suffering; no one escapes it. But John of the Cross's insights have helped me understand that suffering does not result from some divine purgation designed for a spiritual elite. Instead,

suffering arises from the simple circumstances of life itself. Sometimes human suffering is dramatic and horrifying. More often it is ordinary, humble, and quiet. But neither way is it "God's will." The divine presence doesn't intend us to suffer, but is instead *with* us in all the experiences of life, in both suffering and joy. And that presence is always inviting us toward greater freedom and love.

A related misunderstanding is that the dark night is something that occurs once in a lifetime, that one gets through it and moves on to some permanent state of realized union and spiritual ecstasy. . . John's most important mentor and spiritual guide, Teresa of Avila, confesses that the longest time she'd ever experienced such a dramatic state of union was "about half an hour." Teresa maintained that "no one is so advanced in prayer that they do not often have to return to the beginning." I am convinced that instead of being a once-and-for-all experience, the dark night of the soul appears in various ways throughout our lives, always mysterious and always hopeful. . .

At the end of his book (*Why Bad Things Happen To Good People*) [Rabbi Harold] Kushner suggests that the more important question is not why the bad things happen, but how we will respond to them.

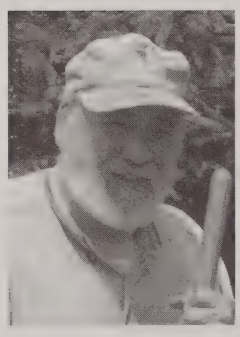
Kushner says that God's role in human suffering is to stand with us, giving us courage and strength and empowering us to respond with compassion and forgiveness. I agree. I also feel that the dark night of the soul reveals an even deeper divine activity: a continually gracious, loving, and fundamentally protective guidance through all human experience—the good as well as the bad.

From the Introduction to The Dark Night of the Soul, *by Gerald G. May, © 2004 by Gerald G. May. Published by arrangement with HarperSanFrancisco. Watch for his forthcoming book,* Healing and Wisdom of Wilderness, *on sale 9/1/06.*

Megan McInerney

Let the Motor Go

Tony Burkart



Years ago in a Trappist monastery I was assigned to a wise old bird as a spiritual director. Whining and complaining at one of our meetings, I remarked that all the daily interruptions to my pursuit of the inner life were becoming both frustrating and anger-generating. He responded, "The interruptions are the path, my friend!"

Over the years his comment has repeatedly struck me as the "raw, bloody truth," as Nietzsche once requested all truth to be. Despite my 58 years of age, I suspect I will continue the cycle of awakening to this reality and then falling asleep to it again.

Last September my wife and I went on a four-day fishing trip with two friends to a large lake in eastern Maine. Settling into our isolated cabin on one of the lake's islands, we decided to take advantage of the last few hours of daylight and take the canoes out on the lake. A stiff, westerly breeze blew down the watershed. We figured we would paddle downwind four miles or so and motor back against the head wind. Our big, twenty-foot, wood-

Tony Burkart lives on a small farm on the coast of Maine with his wife Donna and occasionally his grown son Grey. He has a private practice in what he calls "Contemplative Psychotherapy," focusing on the integration of spirituality with everyday life's circumstances. A Camaldolese Benedictine Oblate, his resolve is to be less of a jerk in extreme moments.

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canvas canoe was incredibly seaworthy but, with its flat bottom and high freeboard, it was good for motoring or sailing but didn't paddle or track well at all.

We scudded down the lake propelled by the tail wind, surfing on the two and three foot swells, prolonging our turnaround time while enjoying the exhilaration of the moment. The last of the sun's rays were rapidly vanishing in the west.

Finally, we decided it was time to head for the island and, with considerable effort turning the canoes into the wind, we reversed direction. This was when my anguished outbursts and gnashing of teeth began. As I repeatedly pumped the fuel tank and pulled on the starter cord, the motor didn't even emit a cough or a pop. It was now becoming increasingly difficult to keep our bow into the wind, let alone make any headway up the lake.

My frustration and anger increased and, although we were now making slow advances with the paddles, the motor remained inert and absolutely refused to start. The situation was not going my way and my worst fears of having to paddle against a considerable head wind with a heavy canoe were rapidly materializing

By now my language had reverted to my navy days and I was making a complete jerk of myself. My wife and friends rolled their eyes with a tense and diminishing tolerance of my behavior. As I repeatedly pulled on the starter cord, pumped the fuel tank, and became even more obnoxiously verbal, my wife finally turned from her place in the bow and said: "Tony, let the motor go!"

Being both frightened, angry, and ego-damaged, I was at the last stages of my reserve. It was obvious to all in the boat, and now to me, that I had crossed the line from functional to "jerkdom."

It all became amusing at that point: What I recall was a momentary shift of ego energy to something else of which I am still uncertain. "Let the motor go" was the only alternative under the circumstances. There was no other choice but to forego any further attempts to start the motor, and instead, pick up the paddle and enjoy what was left of the evening, no matter how long it took us to get back to our island cabin. The astonishing part was that once I honestly let go of the motor, the evening became enjoyable, if not sublime, paddling back with jokes and conversation and the exquisite joy of close friends and the deep wilderness. It was now dark so the kerosene lamp we left lighted on the dock was our one navigational aid and although we could scarcely get a glimpse of it, we were truly seeking the light and had somehow already found it.

This incident has left me reflective over the past six months. Letting the motor go feels more like a process than a conscious decision. It was prompted by my own hubris and helplessness in such a situation, and by the wisdom of the company in which I found myself at the time.

I'm also reminded of the wise counsel of an old monk/spiritual director at Gethsemane some 35 years ago: That which gets in the way of our agenda also contains the potential to be that which is most instructive. And so, frequently we are catapulted into this kind of learning because our own willpower is unable to take us there. I might mention that when I looked over the motor the next morning I found that I had neglected to switch the fuel line to the open position.

As a close friend recently remarked, "It's interesting when you realize you don't need the motor to get home!" What I do instinctively sense is that God's sense of humor is usually laden with both wise instruction and immense grace.

Megan McInerney

Grounding

Michele Naphen

One spring night several years ago I found myself sitting cross-legged on the ground in the middle of my backyard. I had come out to gather my two cats as the light was starting to dim and, as one of them rolled over at my feet, I had sat down to scratch his belly. Sitting on the ground felt good, this direct contact with the earth. My friend Eryn who had studied with Lakota Sioux elders suggested that, when I'm feeling ungrounded, I should just stand outside on the ground for a while, in bare feet, and in silence. I suppose that in feeling the strength of the earth, you begin to feel your own.

I sit outside a lot. In my yard I've arranged two large, comfortable, wooden chairs under a red maple tree. I do some of my best thinking beneath the openness of the sky, a bright sun, and on good days, a breeze. Some afternoons I bring work out here—writing, paperwork, schedule book, to-do lists. On this evening I wondered if any of my neighbors could see me sitting on the ground like this in the semi-darkness. What would they think? It's enough that they see me out here during the day—business hours—with my chairs arranged just so,

Michele Naphen is the editorial assistant for SACRED JOURNEY. She is also a writer and clinical social worker who uses mindfulness meditation practices in her work.

and notebooks, laptop, pens, books, and cordless phone lined up in a sort of functional working order. They look over the fence with questioning looks. I wave, smile, and shout, "My summer office!"

Of all my neighbors with yards, I'm the only one who spends much time just being in the yard, versus working in it. I don't work in the yard unless I have to. Unless someone hints that maybe I should apply for a permit to grow a jungle. Then I'll rake, trim, and cut, or more likely enlist someone else to do it for me. Out here in the suburbs, wild is not politically correct. I don't understand why. Or rather, I do, I just don't agree with it. When the dandelions start sprouting in the spring, I rue the fact that my little plot of grass is the only one dotted with these yellow so-called "weeds." Does everybody use chemicals? No way. And my father's weed whacker? It stays buried somewhere in the garage. I don't understand how some people get along with so little contact with the natural world, and so little awareness of what this world has to offer if only we are open to it.

We humans talk about the "natural" world as if we are separate from it. We're not. We're made of the same stuff, the same basic building blocks of life, as plants, and rocks, and bugs, and stars. A few years ago I learned to speak and listen to the spirits of nature with Tom Cowan, a shamanistic practitioner specializing in Celtic spirituality. Like Native Americans, Tibetans, and many other indigenous peoples, the ancient Celts lived in respectful harmony and intimate communication with the earth. In Cowan's workshop in the woods of New York's Hudson Valley, we were told to find a tree that seemed to call to us. We each circled our tree three times,

holding in our mind a central question to ask. Then we stood with our backs to the trees, our eyes closed, and faced each of the four directions, one by one. In each direction, we asked a question, keeping our eyes closed until we felt moved to open them. The first thing we saw was our answer. The questions were: Who are you? Where are you now? Where are you going? What is your power? My answers were: a small young tree, a large gray rock, a leaf being pushed up in the air in a breeze, and the wind rustling through the leaves.

Each of these answers made sense to me, and offered insight to the question I was struggling with: Will I realistically be able to work with the three directions of my life—working with people, writing, and meditation? When I asked the question for the last time and opened my eyes, directly in front of me was another tree. This tree was unusual, with three smaller trunks splitting off from the main trunk. Two of the smaller trunks formed a V, with the third rising up out of the middle of the V. I was amazed. The tree seemed to be showing me a very lovely yes. I thanked the spirits of the trees and vowed I would do my best.

On that late spring night in my backyard, the darkness soon brought a chill to the air and the ground. But I didn't want to leave the night. I stood, silent and still. My Buddhist teachers call this standing meditation. Remembering their instructions, I felt my feet rooted on the ground, the straightness of my legs and spine, the top of my head reaching towards the sky. Then I focused on my breath, each breath moving in through my belly, and out again. Standing, breathing, rooted, reaching, I knew myself a being of heaven and earth. Only then could I bring myself to go inside.

Megan McInerney

PRAYERS

Praying My Way Into the Mystery

Sometimes I feel like a bit of diamond dust
trying to find its way back to the stone.
It's as if I am part of something I have yet
to name, something that will help explain

what I'm doing here, what I am, and how best
to spend my time. I read once that the journey
is more important than the destination. I hope
that isn't true. So far the trip has been

up hill all the way. Prayer has been my only
respite. That door always leads to lush valleys
where a peace more delicious than sleep waits
for the taking. Somehow, each amen finds me back

on the mountain, digging in with my toes, pulling
myself up the rock one fingerhold at a time.
Sometimes I think the best way to demonstrate my
faith would be to let go, to see if the eagle

wings of the spirit will pick me up and carry
me to the top of the mountain. Maybe I would find
my own burning bush there and maybe nothing more
than the remnants of an ark and a note telling me
to follow the long trail back down the mountain

to the garden below. Would it help if I could
learn to pray without ceasing? I'd have more luck
trying to sing with my toes. Dare I tell you
that my bag of doubts is bigger than my vocabulary?

I drag it into every prayer I enter. Sometimes I use it to stand on. I can't balance there for long, but when I do—for that few seconds—I can see a light shining and hear a voice calling my name.

Fredrick Zydek

Regardless

In
The
Silence
i traveled
Listening to
All of the world's
Prayers
And
Regardless of
The mother tongue
In which they were sung
All remained one
For divine love
Does not split
Any hairs

silent lotus

Fredrick Zydek is a Nebraskan writer with eight collections of poetry. He has more than 800 publication credits. He says he is either incredibly prolific, or incredibly old—or a little of both.

silent lotus is internationally known as an artist, poet, and spiritual advisor. Please visit him online at www.silentlotus.net, *or email him at* insight@silentlotus.net.

A Labyrinth Pilgrim

Ann Hossler

Pilgrimage is a powerful word to me. It implies risk and movement and sacredness. It implies hope and humility and heart. To be a pilgrim is to quest for meaning and blessing, to leave the familiar for the unknown, to risk "what is" for "what might be." Pilgrimage creates a vessel for a sacred search of fulfillment.

I have sensed for years that travel for me is, in a very real sense, a pilgrimage. I tend to define myself as a pilgrim rather than a tourist. I expect to be changed from the experience in a deeper sense than the intellectual knowledge I gain from visiting new museums and eating different food. Many years ago, this pilgrim perspective became especially clear to me during a trip to Bermuda. My highlight to that lovely island country was an afternoon chant at a tiny white-washed chapel perched on a cliff overlooking the sea.

Ann Hossler currently serves as organist to a United Methodist church in Sebastian, Florida. Her spiritual journey has taken her through the traditions of the Evangelical United Brethren, United Methodists, United Church of Christ, Unitarian Universalists, Episcopals, and Quakers. Along the way, she has deveoped a deep love for the spiritual practices of chanting, lectio divina, sacred pilgrimage, and especially, labyrinth walking. Ann is blessed to share her life with her wonderful husband Bob and eight amazing cats.

People who asked about my "favorite thing" seemed to expect tales of pink sand and zipping motorbikes, not an exclamation of a religious experience.

Perhaps because of this striking example, I have become fascinated with the idea of pilgrimage. Throughout history, many traditions have valued the idea of pilgrimage. Moslems make a pilgrimage to Mecca. Christians and Jews make pilgrimages to Jerusalem. Hindus make pilgrimages to sacred rivers and mountains or to an enlightened guru. Even today, modern "worshipers' make pilgrimages to secular shrines like Graceland. The idea of pilgrimage touches something deep. From some inner knowing, some inner compulsion, we humans feel the need to pay homage to a special place of meaning and connection.

Labyrinths were sometimes used in medieval times as a substitute for a "real" pilgrimage. The acts of beginning, of reaching a central "goal," and of returning to the beginning place, replicate the pattern of a geographic pilgrimage. Pilgrims, such as those made famous by Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, leave their homes, travel to a shrine, and return home again. The pattern is circular. The trip is not merely an adventure or a form of exercise; the pilgrim embarks on the journey expecting to be changed along the way. It is not merely one of form but of function, of renewal and blessing. Pilgrims expect to be touched by the Divine.

As mystical as it sounds, I have found that there does appear to be a divine power at work during a labyrinth walk—especially a walk taken in the spirit of pilgrimage. The center, the "destination," is a particularly powerful part of the labyrinth within the pilgrimage context. Just as pilgrims to Canterbury or

Lourdes or Santiago de Compostela expected to be healed and blessed by saints, so, too, can walkers expect to be blessed in the center of the labyrinth. This center becomes a place of insight and wholeness, of illumination in a classical sense. Insights and answers can rise up into consciousness from a seemingly mysterious and unknown source: they are discoveries, not decisions. Within the labyrinth, we are open to listening to the Divine.

Yet even with the seeming primacy of the center of the labyrinth, the preparatory walk and the concluding walk are also integral parts of the process—just as the walks to and *from* a pilgrimage site are integral parts of that process. For in the preparatory walk, pilgrims must prepare for the Divine. They must shed their worldly attentions and expectations and prepare to be touched. This shedding has been given a name by some traditional religious pilgrims. It is called Purgation. This purging of the self can also be part of the process during a labyrinth walk. The walk toward the middle can be a time of centering and release, a time of clearing and cleansing.

The walk from the center has an important function, too. Most pilgrims who have been touched by the Divine are not ready to wholeheartedly reenter the "real" world. They need time to process the message and healing of the Divine, to integrate their new self into the old self that lives in the world. This process of Union is effectively completed during the walk back from the center to the beginning. Although this is often a time of joy, it can also be a time of struggle, for the new does not always fit easily with the old. To risk a pilgrimage is to risk being changed.

I knew I was risking just such a change when my husband and I set out for a whirlwind three day trip to visit Canterbury in England, the classic city of pilgrimage thanks to the martyred Thomas à Becket. As it turns out, however, despite my profound appreciation of the power of Canterbury Cathedral, my own pilgrimage led me to the top of St. Catherine's Hill near Winchester—over 100 miles away! There in Winchester, at the traditional beginning of the Pilgrim's Way that ended in Canterbury, I was led to a beautiful turf labyrinth at the edge of town. My walks there were profound and moving experiences—experiences that changed the direction of my life.

In essence, that rich experience in southern England included a pilgrimage within a pilgrimage: The labyrinth walks themselves were pilgrimages within the pilgrimage quest from Pennsylvania to Canterbury to St. Catherine's Hill. Both experiences felt like I was held in the hand of the Divine.

The power of the labyrinth coupled with the power of pilgrimage is incredibly potent and potentially life-changing. But the amazing realization is that these are not changes of force or coercion. These are changes of encouragement, of gentleness and healing. These are changes of grace. There is nothing that will force pilgrims to change or to grow—nothing except their own sense of enlightenment and courage. The Divine simply invites. Pilgrimages, like labyrinths, are instruments of love, not instruments of duress. Their insights may not be easy, but they are filled with an empowering conviction of joyous possibility.

BOOK REVIEWS

Please enjoy these publishers' reviews of books that have recently come across our desk.

The Wet Engine: Exploring the Mad Wild Miracle of the Heart
By Brian Doyle
Paraclete Press, 2005
www.paracletepress.com
800-451-5006 or 508-255-4685

"Every creature on earth has approximately two billion heartbeats to spend in a lifetime. You can spend them slowly, like a tortoise, and live to be two hundred years old, or you can spend them fast, like a hummingbird, and live to be two years old."

The heart: it is known as the seat of the soul, the power house of the body, the essence of spirituality. No other bodily organ has so captured the imagination of human beings since the beginning of time.

This startling, genuinely unique book moves like a freight train through the scientific, emotional, literary, philosophical, and spiritual understandings of the heart—from cardiology to courage, from love letters and pop songs to Jesus. The torment of Doyle's own infant son's heart surgery is the thread weaving the strands together, but the wisdom is for every person who seeks a more passionate life, in touch with the heart of God.

Brian Doyle is the editor of *Portland Magazine*, and an award-winning author.

Summer: A Spiritual Biography of the Season
Edited by Gary Schmidt and Susan M. Felch,
Illustrated by Barry Moser
SkyLight Paths, 2005, www.skylightpaths.com
Orders: 800-962-4544

Editors Schmidt and Felch fashion a sumptuous banquet with this, their third spiritual biography of a season (after *Autumn* and *Winter*). A season of both growth and stillness, of hard work in the garden and of relaxing in the cool of the mountains, summer is a celebratory time. Every day matters, says *Summer.*

This collection of powerful, stirring pieces from a wealth of sources—ranging from poems composed in eighth-century China to letters from a pioneer woman in the American West, from the Declaration of Independence to Ray Bradbury's musings on childhood summers—invites us all to fully experience the rich and bountiful spirituality of summer.

As Mary Oliver wrote of a summer morning: "As I say, it was the most casual of moments, not mystical as the word is usually meant, for there was no vision, or anything extraordinary at all, but only a sudden awareness of the citizenry of all things within one world." Oliver's story shares company with the other "ordinary" accounts of Anne Lamott building a sand castle with her son, N. Scott Momaday visiting his deceased grandmother's house, and G.K. Chesterton doodling away an afternoon. The writings are presented within five themes: play and leisure, tillage and cultivation, family and community, nature and grace, retreat and return. Each section includes introductory material as well as a recipe, a prayer and, quite fittingly, a psalm.

ENDPIECE

The Trouble Tree
(Author Unknown)

The carpenter I had hired to help me restore an old farmhouse had just finished a rough first day on the job. A flat tire made him lose an hour of work, his electric saw quit, and now his ancient pickup truck refused to start.

While I drove him home, he sat in stony silence. On arriving, he invited me in to meet the family. As we walked toward the front door, he paused briefly at a small tree, touching the tips of the branches with both hands.

After opening the door, he underwent an amazing transformation. His face was wreathed in smiles, and he hugged his two small children and then gave his wife a kiss.

Afterward, he walked me to my car. We passed the tree, and my curiosity got the better of me. I asked him about what I had seen him do earlier.

"Oh, that's my trouble tree," he replied. "I know I can't help having troubles on the job, but one thing's for sure, troubles don't belong in the house with my wife and children. So I just hang them up on the tree every night when I come home. Then in the morning, I pick them up again."

"Funny thing is," he smiled, "when I come out in the morning to pick them up, there aren't nearly as many as I remember hanging up the night before."

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